
Stone, Steven A. Review of Internet Primer for Information Professionals: A Basic Guide to Internet Networking Technology, by Elizabeth Lane and Craig Summerhill. The Public-Access Computer Systems Review 4, no. 3 (1993): 27-29. To retrieve this file, send the following e-mail message to LISTSERV@UHUPVM1 or LISTSERV@UHUPVM1.UH.EDU: GET STONE PRV4N3 F=MAIL.

Lane and Summerhill chose a difficult task for themselves in their new book, Internet Primer for Information Professionals: A Basic Guide to Internet Networking Technology. The Internet is a growing organism, with new tools, services, and possibilities appearing every day. In introducing the Internet, the authors tried to strike a balance between two views of computing instruction: "the majority of end-users [who] want to perform specific computing operations to aid them with their jobs" and others who "see the development of technical self-sufficiency as a tool for life-long learning." This is not an easy balance to achieve, and since the Internet is constantly changing, the authors often chose to explain how the network works, rather than giving concrete examples about how to use the Internet. The resulting book is not a good place to start learning about the Internet. However, after reading Brendan Kehoe's Zen and the Art of the Internet, Tracy LaQuey's The Internet Companion: A Beginner's Guide to Global Networking, or Ed Krol's The Whole Internet User's Guide and Catalog, this book can provide more in-depth information.

The book is divided into six major chapters: "What is the Internet?," "Overview of Current Networks," "Technical Notes," "Network Applications," "Network Resources," and "Policy Issues." As may be apparent from the chapter titles, Lane and Summerhill focus on the specifics of what makes the Internet work. The book gives all the technical information in one chapter, and the actual use of the tools in the next chapter. For instance, the technical aspects and protocols for the Telnet command are in "Technical Notes" on page 48, whereas the way the screen looks when Telnet is actually used is in "Network Applications" on page 106. The reader is often referred to the appropriate chapter for more information and the book has a good index, but it would have been helpful to refer the reader to a particular page rather than to a whole chapter.

The first chapter is "What is the Internet?" with the obligatory history of the Internet, which takes five pages and is roughly the same information available in many other sources.

The second chapter is an "Overview of Current Networks." This chapter should have been omitted or moved further back in the book. It is not essential for beginners, and advanced users are probably ready for more technical and comprehensive works such as Tracy LaQuey's The User's Directory of Computer Networks or John Quarterman's The Matrix: Computer Networks and Conferencing Systems Worldwide.

The third chapter provides "Technical Notes." It covers the protocols behind the functions of the Internet, some network concepts, and file formats. Again, the material is at varying

levels of complexity. Some of it will be familiar to anyone who has used the Internet, but other subjects are covered in a way that will be confusing for intermediate users. Of interest to more advanced users is the inclusion of the current RFC (Request for Comments) number for each of the major protocols.

The fourth chapter is about "Network Applications," including electronic mail, mailing lists/electronic conferences, FTP, Telnet, Finger, and advanced applications. The information is all accurate, but it could have been better organized. For example, the Finger command explanation could have been integrated into the section on finding e-mail addresses in the electronic mail section; however, it was included in its own section.

The fifth chapter discusses "Network Resources." It includes some resources that are not in the beginning books, especially some platform-specific tools that users may find useful (e.g., hypertext tours of the Internet). Expert techniques are discussed, such as the rules for searching LISTSERV lists, which are not included in Krol, LaQuey, or Kehoe. Unfortunately, the chapter's layout makes it hard to jump right to a particular fact.

The sixth chapter, "Policy Issues," is the most interesting and accessible chapter for all classes of users. In twenty-six pages, Lane and Summerhill sketch out some of the major issues regarding the Internet today. There are many articles and even a few books about these topics, most notably The National Research and Education Network (NREN): Research and Policy Perspectives by Charles McClure et al., but this is a concise statement of the major issues, such as barriers to access, transformation of the research process, and legal issues in ownership of information. This section of the book is a good introduction to the challenges of the Internet for any information professional.

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This book tries to cover topics of interest to beginning users, policy makers, and advanced users, which is too much to handle well in 182 pages. Books targeted to specific audiences can do this better. For beginning users, there is Zen and the Art of the Internet, The Internet Companion, and, for advanced beginners, The Whole Internet User's Guide and Catalog. For people interested in policy and shaping the network, there are a few books and many conference proceedings. Advanced users who want to know more about the networks can use LaQuey, Quarterman, and others.

However, this book might be a good stepping stone for those librarians who have made it through the beginning books and have spent some time on the networks and now want to know more about the inner workings of the Internet.

Further Information About the Reviewed Work

Lane, Elizabeth, and Craig Summerhill. Internet Primer for Information Professionals: A Basic Guide to Internet Networking Technology. Westport, CT: Meckler, 1993. 182 pp. $37.50. ISBN: 0-88736-831-X.

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